<Dreams and Reality>

Dreams serve as one of the main themes of this play since Romeo, the main character, is a dreamer. Shakespeare used opposition of dreams and reality in order to reinforce the importance of fate. No matter what we dream when we are asleep, reality does not change. This is because dreams actually do not cause events which will happen in the future, but fate does. However, dreams actually can serve as omens which foretell what might happen in the future.

In Act 1 Scene 4, Romeo’s dream is a dream that foretells the future. Romeo, Benvolio, and Mercutio are on their way to Capulet’s party. While his friends are all excited about the party, Romeo expresses his nervousness and does not show any enthusiasm, but is busy justifying his emotions. This is because he had an ominous dream the previous night. However, Mercutio mocks Romeo for placing importance on dreams, but Romeo believes that while people are asleep, “they do dream things true”(1.4.57). Mercutio then gives the Queen Mab speech to make Romeo realize that dreams cannot be true, but they are worthless. To do this, he describes the fairy queen mab in great detail. For example, “O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you./ She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes/ In shape no bigger than an agate-stone” (1.4.58-60). Since Mercutio is practical and realistic, he intentionally makes his speech sound ridiculous and silly to show Romeo how worthless dreams are. Romeo, who is a dreamer, still thinks dreams have significant meanings. His concern about dreams makes him worried about what is going to happen next. At first, the audience might think Romeo’s obsession with dreams is nonsense; however, his dreams serve as foreshadowing throughout the play. Benvolio and Mercutio do not listen to Romeo’s fears and what he says about his dreams, and so the tragedy begins at Capulet’s party. Romeo’s ominous dream foreshadows his unlucky fate, and although the audience worries about Romeo’s future, they are helpless to change fate.

This theme reappears in the beginning of Act 5. In Act 5 Scene 1, Romeo had an ominous dream the previous night. According to Romeo, “I dreamt my lady came and found me dead--/ Strange dream, that gives a dead man leave to think!--/ And breathed such life with kisses in my lips,/ That I revived, and was an emperor”(5.1.6-10). Right after he dreamt this dream, he was told about Juliet’s death. In Romeo’s previous night’s dream, Romeo was dead but woke up as Juliet kissed him. Even though this dream is not the exact same as what is going to happen in reality, it serves several purposes. First, it foreshadows the end of the play and Romeo’s death. Second, it gives the audience hope that Romeo will kiss Juliet, she will wake up, and those two can live happily ever after. However, it is a false hope and finally they die tragic deaths. In this case, Romeo’s dream does not come true; instead, it turns out to be opposite in reality.

A theme of dream and reality appears frequently throughout the play. Shakespeare’s use of superstition emphasizes how fate is important. Dreams or omens never change what is going to happen in reality, but fate does. However, sometimes dreams are interpreted to have meanings because it foreshadows the future events.

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